

The Life, Works, and Theology of C. S. Lewis

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the entire name.

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Abstract

C. S. Lewis has been most recognized through his literature that gave the general public a better insight into Christian theology, written during a life that was a journey through atheism to Christianity. C. S. Lewis was criticized by his peers as well as some scholars in today's society for oversimplification of Christian beliefs. He has also been made into an icon of Christian apologetics for the way he was able to make Christianity understandable to everyone. C. S. Lewis did not set out to be a Christian theologian. His goal was to win people over to Christianity. People who view C. S. Lewis's work and see it as overly simplified are not viewing it the way it was meant to be read. C. S. Lewis had no degree in theology and never claimed to be an expert in it. He gave the people of his era a view of Christianity that was to help them understand what it was about without giving them complex treatises detailing the issues.

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There was a time in the 1940's and 1950's in which C. S. Lewis was a household name in both America and England. He was famous for his radio talks as well as for the books he wrote. Lewis's name and works gained attention because of the distinctive way that he influenced people to look at Christianity. C. S. Lewis did not believe that people should approach Christianity exclusively based on an emotional reaction, but rather that they should believe because it logically and rationally appealed to them. The idea of requiring a logical and rational apologetic approach that was therefore intellectually satisfactory was at the core of Lewis' perspective, but did not comprise it in its entirety. Many Christians honor him for this ability to analyze and intellectually debate the validity of Christian thought, yet he did not forget to include the importance of faith in his discourses. Moreover, the works that have endeared him most to generations of Christians were his children's fantasies, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. He therefore continues to appeal to seekers of the deeper Truths and myths of human existence.

Yet there had been nothing special about C. S. Lewis's childhood or religious upbringing that made him uniquely adept at understanding religion. In fact from adolescence until he turned 28 in 1926, he became a determined atheist, distracted by his education, World War I, and his personal relationships. It was not until he began searching for the feeling of *Joy*, which he had once known as a child, that he became interested in re-examining the merits of Christianity. However, C. S. Lewis had to resolve certain problems that Christianity posed. For example, if there was indeed a good, caring, sovereign, omniscient, and omnipotent god, then how then could pain exist? He also had to examine Christianity's claim to exclusivity. If Christianity held the Truth, then why did so many of the world's mythologies seem similar to each other? Another concept that Lewis had to explore was the Trinity. Was Jesus the son of God, and as such, a part of God? Crucial to all of these questions was the reliability of the Gospel accounts.

His examination of all these questions, and his determination that the Christian answers to these questions were intellectually credible, led C. S. Lewis to his conversion to Christianity. C. S. Lewis then turned to apply his intellectual gifts to write on these topics, which had influenced his own personal conversion, in order to help others understand the tenets of Christianity.

It was his works on Christianity that gained him fame and popularity. However Lewis did not write about much else. Theologians and his colleagues at Oxford criticized him for writing on a topic in which he had no formal academic training. Others attacked him (then and now) for oversimplifying the views of the opponents to Christianity. It was the encouragement of friends and family that helped Lewis overcome the criticism of skeptics. C. S. Lewis's brother and wife were instrumental in giving him courage and inspiration. His American audience was less critical and more receptive to C. S. Lewis's writing than those around him at Oxford. Any cultural icon becomes more than the mere sum of his pronouncements, but an analysis of his critics' objections requires an effort to understand what he was trying to accomplish rather than what his critics or supporters have suggested. To understand what C. S. Lewis's goal was in writing, his life, conversion, works, and his audiences need to be examined. He was not seeking to become a theologian, and through his works, literary and otherwise, he only hoped to win people to Christianity in a way that appealed to their sense of reason, logic, and understanding. He was a layman who would want to be remembered through his works in the context that they continue to win souls over to Christianity.

Clive Staples Lewis did not have a unique childhood, although there may be people who would think differently based on his accomplishments later in life. He grew up mostly under his father's care because his mother had died while Jack (as his friends called him) was still young. Lewis grew up in Ireland and was a loner as a child. Because of a slight physical disability and

the self-consciousness that he felt as a result, he did not go outside and play with the other boys, but instead he delighted in creating stories. Lewis and his brother Warren Lewis created their own world of talking animals. Even when Warren was sent away from home to go to school in England, Lewis continued writing the stories and would keep his brother up to date on the next adventure the animals were involved with. Much later these stories would be published under the title *Boxen*. When he got older, his father sent him to England to attend school with his brother. It was at this time in his life he decided to conceal his stories from his classmates and teachers.

He hid his imaginative life from others, not by choice, but because, until he met Arthur Greeves, he had no friend with whom to share it. Indeed, he knew no one who could even understand. He feared ridicule and perhaps even the accusation of madness. The self he showed to his contemporaries was that of the witty, blasphemous, sex-obsessed schoolboy.¹

Many adolescents experience a feeling, that nobody will understand them. Lewis was no different. Many teenagers feel that their situation is unique and unprecedented.. This feeling of uniqueness is referred to in psychology as a personal fable, and it comes from the idea that the adolescent believes that they have a special destiny.² Lewis was a normal introverted boy who was trying to come to terms with the world around him.

Like other children and teenagers, Lewis was not specially trained in religious studies. He experienced only the basics of church and Sunday school while he lived in Ireland. Most of what he heard from the pulpit was political jargon and feel-good philosophy. It was not until he went away to school in England that he began to understand that Christianity and church were something much more than a place to express a person's political belief and to feel good about themselves. "For the first time, he heard in sermons not 'general uplift' but the essential doctrines of Christianity taught by men who really believed in them. He began to pray seriously,

to feel for and to follow his conscience, and to read the Bible.”³ The ideas that Lewis heard gave him more information about Christianity than he had heard before. Receiving the information was not enough; he heard the ideas from people who believed in them wholeheartedly, and this encouraged Lewis to want to mimic their enthusiasm for Christianity. Lewis based his beliefs on what other people were thinking and feeling, but these ideas and beliefs were not his own. This kept Lewis from accepting them unconditionally, so they did not last long at this time in his life. He soon turned away from these Christian beliefs to focus on a belief system that he thought was more logical than Christianity. That choice was atheism.

There are several reasons for Lewis’s decision to accept atheism. George Sayer, who was one of Lewis’s former students and later became one of his closest friends, had one opinion about why Lewis turned to atheism. Sayer believed that the reason Lewis embraced atheism was that, while Lewis had prayed seriously, he felt that his prayers were not helping him manage the sin he was dealing with; as a result he stopped believing in God altogether.⁴ This was not the only reason that Lewis turned away from Christianity. Chad Walsh interviewed Lewis and concluded that there were at least three other reasons that Lewis converted to atheism. The first reason was the effect of a matron at one of the schools Lewis attended who intrigued Lewis with her advocacy of spiritualism and theosophy, beliefs focused on mysticism and pantheism. The second reason was that at that time Lewis resolved what he later called “the problem of pain”—that if pain existed in the world and God let bad things happen—in favor of the conclusion that God could not be good. Finally, his interest and study of myths led him to the conclusion that if those beliefs were false, then Christianity must also be false.⁵ “Atheism had appealed to Lewis as a dogmatic system, something one could prove by hard hitting dialectic.”⁶ From the time he converted to atheism until 1926, when he started leaning towards Christianity again, religion

played a minuscule role in Lewis's life. Lewis wrote his father and told him he was attending church services, but Lewis was in fact just trying to humor his father and was not really attending any religious services.

Lewis was not focused on religious contemplation during this time in his life; instead his concentration was on the war, his education, and his friend Paddy Moore and Paddy Moore's mother, Mrs. Moore. Lewis entered the military as an officer through his attendance at Oxford and served during World War I, and it was during those years that he met Paddy Moore. Lewis did not know Paddy for an extended period of time, but the effects of their relationship lasted for most of Lewis's life. Paddy was Lewis's roommate in the first part of the war, but this ended when Paddy died in combat. Lewis and Paddy's mother, Mrs. Moore, became attached during the time before and after Paddy's death. They rented several houses together, and eventually bought a home to live in. Many people close to Lewis believed that he had promised Paddy he would take care of Mrs. Moore if Paddy were to die. This was only speculation though. No one really knows why Lewis took care of her. Another theory is that since Lewis had lost his mother, and Mrs. Moore had lost her son, they filled those roles for each other.* When Lewis returned

* There are no details available on the nature of Lewis's relationship with Mrs. Moore. Some of Lewis's contemporaries have suggested that there was a sexual aspect to their relationship, but there is no documentation of this. One possible source of information about their relationship is in the letters Lewis sent to Arthur Greeves, but Greeves burned selected letters that may have contained information on the bond between Lewis and Mrs. Moore. George Sayer believes there is a fifty-fifty chance that there was a sexual aspect to their relationship. Sayer was one of Lewis's closest companions later in life, and even he did not know if Lewis's relationship with Mrs. Moore was more than just a close friendship.

But there are less sensational explanations for their bond. Paddy may have approached Lewis about taking care of his mother. Mrs. Moore's husband continued to live in Ireland, while Mrs. Moore had moved to England with their young daughter and Paddy. She wanted a more permanent separation, but her husband refused to give her a divorce. Mrs. Moore was often in need of financial help because her husband sent very little money to support Mrs. Moore and their children with basic necessities. Paddy may have asked Lewis to help his mother knowing his father was unreliable.

Even before Paddy's death, Lewis had begun to spend time with Mrs. Moore; a mother-son relationship could have developed early after Lewis met her. Lewis needed an emotional bond with a "parental" figure, for he and his father did not get along well during this period. Mrs. Moore visited Lewis while he was in recovery for injuries he sustained in combat. Lewis implored his father to come to England while he was recuperating, but his father never came. His mother was long dead by this time, and his father was not sensitive to Lewis's need for a

from the war, he also returned to his studies at Oxford, but he never ceased to help Mrs. Moore. His father continued to support Lewis monetarily for many years while Lewis struggled to get a fellowship or position at Oxford after graduation. Mrs. Moore remained tightly connected with Lewis through those years. Lewis's brother Warren did not like Mrs. Moore, and he constantly complained that she worked Lewis too hard. Regardless of Warren's opinion, Lewis did everything he could to help Mrs. Moore whenever he could and without complaint.⁷ From 1917 when Lewis joined the armed forces until about 1926, the war, school, and Mrs. Moore were the driving forces in his life.

After 1926 though, C. S. Lewis started his journey away from atheism to theism and eventually to Christianity. "Jack's conversion to Christianity occurred over a period of several years—from 1926, the year *Dymer* was published, when he began to believe in a nebulous power outside himself, to 1931, when he became a believer in Christ."⁸ The road to Christianity for Lewis can be accurately referred to as a journey. In 1926 he became a theist, but it was not until 1931 that he became a Christian. His spiritual journey was not an emotional reaction to the salvation and forgiveness of sins that Christianity offers but a slow logical evolution of how Lewis saw religion. "By 1926 he was a practicing theist who had no belief in the gospel story or in the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."⁹ Lewis had to rethink how he had formerly understood pain and myth before Christianity could make sense to him. There were those around him that helped him shape new ideas about how pain and myth could be understood through Christianity. Among these people was J. R. R. Tolkien, who along with another close friend, sent Lewis on the path to rediscover what Christianity was really about. There was one central idea that helped Lewis find faith in Christianity. Lewis was in search of what he called *Joy*. It

concerned parent. Mrs. Moore entered Lewis's life at a crucial moment, and he may have become attached to her as a result of his father's apparent lack of interest in his life.

was this search that ultimately led him to his conversion.

Early in his life, Lewis had experienced a feeling of immense happiness and deep longing which he called *Joy*. He did not know what he was longing for, but during his childhood he came across this feeling of joy several times and desired more of it. As he entered into his teenage years and became an atheist, this feeling eluded him, and he could not find anything that gave him this type of joy. It was not until Lewis began reexamining Christianity, that he was able to encounter this feeling of joy once again.

He [Lewis] had not, he discovered, really desired Joy itself; he had desired the object of which Joy itself was the desire and which had given Joy the form it took. But the object had no connection with any state of his own mind or body; a process of elimination had shown him this. Therefore the object of Joy was something wholly other from himself; and this conclusion brought him “already into the region of awe.”¹⁰

Through this process Lewis deduced that the joy he had felt was his reaction when he was connecting with God. Lewis discovered that he did not really want to find joy, but something outside of himself that had created joy and made joy take the appearance that Lewis had been experiencing. However, Lewis needed more than to experience this joy again. He yearned for the entity that gave him joy. The essence of Christianity is the personal relationship with Christ, and that while longings (such as that for joy) send people questing for Christ, in the process they discover that true joy comes not in seeking to fulfill longings, but in sacrifice such as that modeled by Christ. Christianity offered Lewis the object he seemed to desire, a way to connect with that object on a personal level, and a means of how to return to a state of joy that he longed for.

Later Lewis used the German word *Sehnsucht* to describe the depth of this joy better. “In several places Lewis has referred to the state of mind under discussion as *Sehnsucht*. I follow him in this choice of term because the German word has overtones of nostalgia and longing not

to be found in any English word. Also, unlike such terms as 'mystical' and 'romantic,' it has the advantage of not being overburdened by connotations."¹¹ Lewis chose *Sehnsucht* to describe joy because *Sehnsucht* gave a deeper more meaningful explanation of what he was feeling. Joy was not just a feeling of passionate happiness, it something much more for Lewis. His search for joy was important on his journey toward Christianity, but without addressing other issues that conflicted with his ideas of logic, Lewis could not accept Christianity.

Rather than base his religious beliefs exclusively on a feeling, such as joy, Lewis had to have a religion that appealed to his sense of reason and logic. His emotional quest for "joy" led directly to a logical quest for truth. Lewis first had to believe in the existence of a god and had to understand how God and pain could exist in the world together. "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust."¹² Lewis thought that the existence of pain in the world proved that if God existed then he must be cruel and unjust. In his opinion a good god would not allow misfortunes to take place in the world. Many people grow up believing that God is good, but Lewis had come to the conclusion that God could not be good. Given that so much pain and suffering exists in the world, either God must not really exist or must be bad. However, this analysis of God was unsettling to Lewis, and he had to change his ideas and look at this issue a different way.

But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line... If the whole show was bad and senseless from A to Z, so to speak, why did I, who was supposed to be part of the show, find myself in such violent reaction against it?¹³

Without having an example of what it was to be unjust as well as just, these concepts could not exist. Without a standard, Lewis could not judge any idea as being just or unjust. There could be no universals. Logic itself could not have any basis. If there was no model of what logic or justice was, then anything could be called logical or just. Lewis saw that there was much

injustice in the world, so he understood there was a difference between being just and unjust. He also hated the unjust part of the world, so in his logic, there had be something that gave him the idea of what it was to be just.

To understand the ideas of being just and unjust, Lewis applied a process of logical thinking that he used whenever he tried to understand anything and everything he encountered. He treated his acceptance of Christianity no differently. To understand how pain and God could both exist in the world, he had to make sure he included himself as part of the problem. Lewis often tore apart arguments in which those talking only looked at the problem, while not including themselves within the problem.¹⁴ To accept God, he had to try and reason how justice could exist in an unjust world.

I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies. Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense.¹⁵

Lewis was trying to understand how any sense of justice could exist in a wholly unjust world. One possibility was that he had created the idea of justice independently of the world. That did not work either since he is a part of the world and understands what being just means, because then the whole world can not be unjust.

Lewis did believe there was a moral code that should be followed, yet he could not understand how a moral code could exist if there was no God.

If God is dead, then everything is permitted—Nietzsche and Dostoevsky both drew the same conclusion. Put less dramatically and theologically, it might be said that if there is no God, then everything is permitted, because there is no grounds for calling anything—an act, a statement, an event, a choice—either good or bad, right or wrong, valuable or worthless, important or unimportant.¹⁶

Lewis therefore concluded that he had lost his original argument against God because justice does exist, and that idea of justice as well as the idea of injustice has to come from somewhere. If God did not exist, then Lewis would have to say everything was senseless, even justice. "Hence, Lewis rejects both pantheism and naturalism and holds the Jewish-Christian concept of a God who stands outside creation altogether."¹⁷ God was something that did not exist in creation but outside of it. This gives God the ability to determine ideas such as justice, morality, and logic. Lewis was able to reconcile his view that a good God and pain could exist together in the world since ideals such as justice existed in a seemingly unjust world.

The other main issue that Lewis had to resolve was to understand how the myths he had studied could be false although they seemed to be remarkably similar to Christianity, which claimed to be the exclusive Truth and Way to God. J. R. R. Tolkien was one person who gave Lewis an alternate theory to explain the similarities between many myths and Christianity. "To the Mythmakers [Charles Williams, Lewis, and Tolkien], Christianity is a matter of [historical] facts and a philosophical interpretation of the universe, as well as a religion. In their view, Christianity is the great and central historical embodiment of myth. It is the archetypal myth of which all others are more or less distorted images."¹⁸ The idea that Tolkien was able to convey to Lewis was that there was truth in the universe before the beginning of time, and that Christianity is both Truth and myth. Myth, in this view, is referring to a historical story that has a purpose. It may be a product of human imagination, but Tolkien and Lewis believed that the history of Christianity was myth and was also true events and stories. While the other myths in the world had started out being Truth, they were corrupted by what man wanted them to be. In his own words Lewis said, "He [God] sent the human race what I call good dreams: I mean those queer stories scattered all through the heathen religions about a god who dies and comes to life

again and, by his death, has somehow given new life to men.”¹⁹ This idea was not able to be completely understood until the myth becomes reality in Jesus’s death and resurrection. In Lewis’s view there was Truth before creation, but most men corrupted the Truth with various myths. The true myth is revealed in Jesus Christ, at which point myth and Truth merged to become the same.

The idea of myth and Truth existing as the same thing was vital to Lewis’s conversion. For him, there was a very real need to understand how the different myths throughout history had so many similar events and ideas in their stories. Lewis had to find a way to unite the myths and Christianity, and yet lose nothing of their individual significance. “His purpose was to combine an old love with a newer, to combine the romance of the far off and faerie with the religion of his maturity, to unite what the imagination loved with what the intellect was convinced to be true. In short, his purpose was . . . to romanticize religion.”²⁰ The myths were intriguing and beautiful, and Lewis was a romantic who enjoyed myths and fairy tales. He was also convinced that Christianity was the Truth. Lewis had a vivid imagination and used that along with reason to understand how both myth and Truth could exist together. This gave Lewis the ability to allow myths and Truth to exist at the same time and be united as well as being independent.

Another one of the ideas that helped C. S. Lewis’s conversion to Christianity was an argument by G. K. Chesterton. “He could not get out of his head such arguments as Chesterton’s that, in claiming to be the Son of God, Jesus was either a lunatic or a dishonest fraud or he was speaking the truth.”²¹ This premise is based on the idea that with the claims Jesus was making about being the son of God, he could not be just a good moral teacher.²² If Jesus was merely a good moral teacher, he would not have made claims of divinity. To give an example of one of Jesus’s claims to being God is the story of the paralytic in which Jesus forgives the man of his

sins, and the teachers of the Jewish law see this as blasphemy since only God has the ability to forgive people of their sins.

You tread on my toe and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobed and untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give of his conduct. Yet this is what Jesus did.²³

A good moral teacher would not lie, and if Jesus was merely a human, in Lewis's viewpoint, he would not be able to forgive people of their sins. The conclusion that Lewis came up with is that for Jesus to be just a moral teacher and not be what he had claimed to be would be contradictory. According to this logic, Jesus could not have been a good moral teacher and a liar. Lewis takes this idea a step farther; in Mere Christianity he adds the possibility of Jesus either being a lunatic, God, or a demon. "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."²⁴ Lewis does not continue on to counter the arguments for viewing Jesus as a lunatic or demon. He probably believed that the explanations for these were self-evident. Lewis himself did not believe that Jesus was either of these two descriptions. A lunatic would have had trouble convincing those around him that he was sane, and there is no record of Jesus having this problem. A demon would have wanted to cause detriment to those around him, and Jesus never hurt anyone in any Biblical records nor any secular ones. Lewis came to the conclusion that Jesus was the son of God, and that this relationship gave him the same authority as God.

One critic of Lewis suggested there was another possible explanation for the claims Jesus made about himself. John Beversluis contends that Jesus may have honestly believed he was the

messiah promised to the Jews by God, and that Jesus could have been mistaken about his identity.²⁵ “All that is required for the claim to make sense is that [Jesus] sincerely believe that he is God.”²⁶ In society today, if a person believed he was God, people today would either view him as a lunatic or see that the claim was valid and accept him as God. A man who claimed to be God would have to sincerely believe his claim to be crazy; otherwise he would be a liar making claims that even he could not believe in. Beversluis believes there is an alternative of sincere delusion between Jesus being a lunatic and being a liar, but Lewis would argue that there is no such alternative—and certainly that someone who was that deluded about his own identity would not be a valid source of moral teaching. Thus there is no essential difference between Beversluis’ sincerely deluded Jesus and Lewis’ lunatic in regard to the claim that Jesus was merely a good teacher.

Another Biblical argument that Lewis came to believe was that the Gospels were an accurate portrayal of what actually happened during the time of Jesus’s life. “Jack reread the Gospels and became more and more aware that they were not myths or made-up stories at all, because the authors were simply too artless and unimaginative.”²⁷ The gospels were written by Jesus’s disciples, and often the disciples had trouble understanding what Jesus was trying to tell them without further explanation. The gospel writers could have easily changed the facts to make it seem they knew and understood more than they did, but they chose to display their ignorance. This would suggest that most if not all of what they wrote would have to be the truth. Lewis had examined many ideas on his path toward Christianity. He scrutinized his feelings of joy, the belief that there was a good God, and Biblical evidence that Jesus was who he claimed to be. Lewis still had to make the decision to believe this research or to reject it.

No amount of substantiation could replace Lewis's need to have faith in everything that he had collected. "Christian orthodoxy has always held that it is necessary for one to accept an unfathomable mystery before one can become a Christian. . . . No amount of reason or evidence can make one a Christian apart from the calling and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. . . . A sound apologetic must always operate within the bounds of these considerations."²⁸ Lewis knew he had to have faith as well as understanding. Not every person who becomes a Christian needed this understanding like Lewis did, but for Lewis it gave him the answers to questions that he yearned to have. Finally, in 1931, Lewis relented and surrendered his life to Christianity. Lewis had finally come to the conclusion that Christianity was the logical choice.

After C. S. Lewis's conversion to Christianity, the words for his books flowed out of his mind and onto the paper. Many of them were based on the experiences of his own conversion. He had written very little prior to becoming a Christian and had only two works published before 1933. Lewis had dabbled in poetry before he became a Christian, and originally he had believed that he would make his career writing poetry. This did not work out for him, mainly because of the trouble he had getting his works published. The Pilgrim's Regress was the first work Lewis published after becoming a Christian, and it was basically an allegory of his own journey to Christianity. He also wrote scholarly papers about his conversion. "He published a couple of other scholarly books in the next few years, and several works dealing directly or indirectly with theology, but his real leap into public attention dates from 1941 when *The Screwtape Letters* began to appear serially in *The Guardian*."²⁹ Lewis was not seeking fame from his writing, but he became well known throughout England and the United States after he wrote The Screwtape Letters. While Lewis did write several purely scholarly works, what he really wanted to accomplish was to present a clear view of the essential doctrines of Christianity. Lewis wrote in

a variety of forms to convey his message: allegories, science fiction, academic treatises, fiction, literary criticism, children's fantasy, an autobiography, and apologetics, which were all based on Christianity.

Narnia enabled him to represent Christianity as a grand myth in which a deeper reality permeates what we experience. The main characters in the stories are four siblings, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy, who mistakenly enter Narnia during a game of hide-and-seek. These English Children are relocated during World War II to the country to protect them from the German bombings of London. The children anticipate that their stay in the country will be boring, but when Lucy accidentally finds Narnia by stepping into a wardrobe to hide, the children find adventure beyond anything they could imagine. The land of Narnia is filled with dwarfs, fawns, talking animals, witches, kings, pirates, and Aslan. Aslan is the king over the whole world of Narnia, yet he allows himself to be humbled and sacrifices his own life to save Edmund, who had betrayed his siblings and later repented. Throughout the stories Lewis weaves Christian symbols, such as Aslan who represented Jesus, as well as myths and fairy tales. "But the author [Lewis] almost certainly did not want his readers to notice the resemblance of the Narnian theology to the Christian story. His idea, as he once explained to me, was to make it easier for children to accept Christianity when they met it later in life."³⁰ Lewis wanted to introduce Christianity in a way children could understand without overtly pressing it upon them. For these narratives Lewis knit together the two major interests of his life, Christianity and myth and by doing this gave children a fantasy world in which to explore Christianity.

The Chronicles of Narnia were not his first Christian series; Lewis also had written a science fiction trilogy. These books, Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength, were the story of a linguist named Ransom, and his experiences on Mars and Venus as

well as Earth. Ransom is kidnapped by evil scientists who plan to give him as a sacrifice to the creatures on Mars. The scientists were mistaken about the need for a sacrifice, and Ransom escapes them and eventually joins the natives to survive. Ransom learns in this journey that all worlds had Oyarsas, which is a ruling angel, and that the Oyarsa of Earth had become “bent.” “Bent” was the closest word in the native language to evil or bad. There was no evil on Mars, so they did not have any words that described malevolence. Lewis was trying to contrast what he felt was the fallen state of people on Earth with the goodness of intelligent life in the universe.

Christianity, says Lewis, tells us that rebellion of the lower nature had a beginning in time and will also have a conclusion at some future date. It began with primal man’s first disobedience, which brought upon him the necessity for work, pain, grief and finally death. Eventually there will be a reconciliation; indeed a reconciliation is already taking place.³¹

In these novels Lewis describes the rebellion on Earth and concludes with the beginning of a reunion between earth and the rest of the universe.

All of Lewis’s writing after he became a Christian described some type of theological idea, but he also wrote works that had no other purpose than to defend and explain Christianity. The Problem of Pain, Mere Christianity, Miracles, and A Grief Observed are some of the major apologetics that Lewis wrote. In these works he discussed issues that had previously kept him from accepting God. Lewis felt a calling to help explain Christianity so that more people could understand what it was about.

Lewis was an apologist from temper, from conviction, and from modesty. From temper, for he loved an argument. From conviction, being traditionally orthodox. From modesty, because he laid no claim either to the learning which would have made him a theologian or to the grace which would have made him a spiritual guide. His writings certainly express a solid confidence; but it is the confidence that he can detect the fallacy of current objections to belief, and appreciate the superiority of orthodox tenets over rival positions; that he has some ability, besides, to make others see what he so clearly sees himself.³²

Lewis's personality made him naturally adept in becoming an apologetic, and his belief in orthodox Christianity made it important for Lewis to evangelize. Lewis dealt with the issues that had formally hindered his acceptance of God. Lewis was gifted in demonstrating what was wrong with these ideas, and then helping others understand this position.

While Lewis wrote many works, some people were curious about topics that Lewis decided not to write about. For example, while some of his contemporaries chose to write about World War I or World War II he did not. Sayer asked and answered this question about Lewis's writing,

Why did he write almost nothing about the war? I can offer only two suggestions: One is that he felt it too strongly, so strongly that he could not bear to recall it. The other is that he was preoccupied with his life as an undergraduate and with his dependence on a father who was jealous and suspicious of his relationship with Mrs. Moore.³³

Even before his conversion, Lewis did not write about the war. Sayer believes this is either because the war affected him too deeply, or he was simply preoccupied. It was not that Lewis was against the war, because he was strongly against pacifism. He did not condemn people who were pacifist, but he did feel that they were misguided.³⁴ "It is no good quoting 'Thou shalt not kill.' There are two Greek words: the ordinary word to *kill* and the word to *murder*. And when Christ quotes that commandment He uses the *murder* one in all three accounts, Matthew, Mark, and Luke."³⁵ Lewis did not feel that pacifism was a Biblical principle. There is an uncomplicated explanation to why Lewis did not write on war. He often said that he wrote about ideas that he would have liked to read about. He had trouble finding books that he liked, so he decided to write them himself. Lewis probably did not write about the war, simply because books about war did not hold his interest.

The books Lewis did write reflected Christian values, ideas, and beliefs, but he did not

want to be considered someone who was a theologian. "What we have in Lewis is primarily an ecumenical venture; the aim of his Christian writings is to present the fundamentals of orthodox Christianity to his readers, avoiding as far as possible controversial issues."³⁶ Lewis did not want to create new ideas that would lead to intense theological debates. In his writings he wanted to help the reader understand what the primary ideas of Christianity were and give examples to how they could be interpreted. Lewis did not tackle the controversial issues because he was more interested in uniting Christians rather than focusing on issues that would drive the different Christian groups away from each other. "C. S. Lewis never intends in his writing to make startling or original contributions to Christian thought; his aim throughout is to present 'mere Christianity' from the standpoint of the layman."³⁷ Lewis never claimed to be a theologian, but a layman who was trying to present Christianity in a way that a majority of people would be able to understand. He did not write for the educated elite that he was a part of, but rather he wrote so that the common people would read his work, understand and be interested in his topics.

Lewis was not formally trained in theology, so he did not consider himself a theologian, although many people considered him one. While he did receive an honorary degree in 1946 as a Doctor of Divinity from St. Andrews University in Scotland, this was an honorary degree and was not obtained through studying theology.³⁸ There were a variety of attitudes among the clergy whether Lewis was a good influence or not.

Nor were the British theologians unanimous in their welcome. I detected more than one twinge of professional envy as I talked with some of them. Who, they seemed to be asking, is this upstart who has not had the benefit of formal theological training or the laying on of hands and who yet presumes to preach the gospel to a vaster audience than we can reach?³⁹

The theologians of Lewis's day did not accept Lewis into their ranks. Many of them resented

Lewis's ability to influence large numbers of people, while they struggled to sway the masses toward Christianity. Lewis was also accused by at least one of his contemporary clergy members of oversimplification, and this same clergy member was annoyed that Lewis preached twice at Congregational churches during the time services were being held at the Anglican churches. Lewis was a member of an Anglican church, and this gave the clergy a sense that Lewis was not loyal to his own denomination.⁴⁰ Lewis was hailed by many for bringing theology to the common man, but not everyone thought this was his place to do so especially among those who had been trained to teach the Bible and theology. Lewis was a highly educated person, and did have more than just a passing knowledge of theology, but it was not his specialty.

There was also a large body of people who worked with and around Lewis who felt Lewis was wasting his talent. Lewis had taken the highest honors in the degrees he pursued while at Oxford. He was very skillful in analyzing medieval literature and different mythologies, particular Norse mythology. "Among the book-store clerks, and still more among professional scholars, I encountered some sad shaking of the head because Lewis has not devoted himself exclusively to literary research."⁴¹ This attitude was most noted by American Chad Walsh who came to Britain to meet and research Lewis in order to write a study of him. Lewis was a brilliant scholar, but because he wrote as an evangelical Christian, there were those among his colleagues who believed his abilities were being put to a lesser use than Lewis's potential could achieve. Although there was disapproval of the choices he made, Lewis was doing what he wanted to do no matter what those around him may have thought. For Lewis's decision to write and defend Christianity he not only received criticized for wasting his talent, but his Christian behavior also caused him to suffer ridicule.

Lewis was also criticized because he challenged what mainstream society viewed as the

correct behavior for Christians to conduct themselves.

You might encounter a man frequently without ever knowing that he was a Christian. It was unlikely that in ordinary conversation he would uphold Christian principles and almost unheard of that he would make a vigorous, logical attack on nonbelievers from a Christian standpoint. Skepticism, tolerance, and even indifference were commonly thought to be the proper attitude toward Christianity.⁴²

Society has often preferred that people with strong religious beliefs keep silent, fearing that stirring up religious passions would explode disagreement into violence. People that Lewis was around would have held this view that Christians should not share their beliefs with those around them. Lewis did not care that what he had to say was sometimes unwelcome; when he wanted to say something about his faith, he said it. He also had the boldness to attack the beliefs of those who were not Christians. This was extremely unpopular among his colleagues at Oxford. "It was commonly thought that a man's belief is a private affair and should not be written about or published. It was thought unsociable and a breach of the conventions for members of the Senior Common Room to attack others for their beliefs or, worse still, to try to convert them."⁴³ Lewis broke an established social taboo of publicly writing about and discussing his faith. Not only was Lewis voicing his convictions, but he was trying to influence what others believed. The opposition that he faced was not mild, and this made life for Lewis at Oxford very difficult.

He was unhappy at his Oxford College. At dinner there I sensed the occasional whiff of hostility from some of his colleagues. The academic mind is a master of the politely barbed shaft. The college was pervaded by an abrasive anti-Christian humanism at that time, which gave Lewis a good deal of painful opposition.⁴⁴

During the time Lewis was at Oxford, the atmosphere was decisively against evangelism, and this kept his colleagues from accepting him and his ideas about Christianity. Lewis wanted to share his beliefs with his colleagues, but they did not want to hear what Lewis had to say.

Those who criticized Lewis for his views on Christianity are not limited to those in

ministry or some of his contemporaries. John Beversluis, who is a modern critic of Lewis, wrote in C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion about various ideas that Lewis developed. He contends that Lewis oversimplified philosophical thought. Beversluis supports his argument by listing philosophers and philosophies that Lewis failed to mention in his broadcast talks.⁴⁵ Lewis' intended audience was the general public, not the educated elite. Lewis wanted to clarify morality for his audience, and if he had discussed the varied and complicated philosophies that Beversluis mentions it would have confused rather than enlightened the general public. Overall Beversluis claims that Lewis's conversion was based on conflicting ideas that Lewis himself could not resolve, and that this destroys Lewis's argument for Christianity being the only logical religion.⁴⁶ Lewis was neither a theologian nor a philosopher. While Lewis was familiar with many of the ideas of theology and philosophy, Lewis defended Christianity by taking any individual given theory, boiling it down to what the theories implications were (in Beversluis' view, oversimplifying them), and then comparing it to Christianity. Beversluis rejects any of Lewis's arguments in which Lewis does not go into the details of the philosophy. This gives an incomplete picture of Lewis's philosophies and ideas.

Lewis's position of influence did not only subject him to criticism, but those associated with him sometimes have had to defend themselves. Kathryn Lindskoog is a critic of Walter Hooper. Hooper became Lewis's personal secretary when Lewis's brother Warren was unable to continue. Lindskoog claims that Hooper has forged works that he had published in Lewis's name after Lewis's death. The primary work that Lindskoog has questioned the authorship of is The Dark Tower. One of her claims is based on the idea that the writing is inconsistent with Lewis' normal style of prose. The other claim is based on her charge that no one has been able to see the original manuscript.

Green disagreed. He told me that he didn't get to see the original manuscript in 1964 or at any other time. Green had been a friend of C.S. Lewis for seventeen years, and he was accustomed to reading Lewis's handwriting. Yet all he ever saw of *The Dark Tower* was a typed copy that Hooper gave to him so he could describe the story in their Lewis biography.⁴⁷

Green had been a close friend of Lewis and someone who could have verified the authorship, but he had never seen the original manuscript. Kathryn Lindskoog brings up many questions in her works, but she fails to find answers herself. Her only conclusion to the unanswered questions she poses is that The Dark Tower is a forgery. Unfortunately there are problems with Lindskoog's logic. Her findings are inconclusive. Lindskoog quotes many sources, but she often takes them out of the context they were intended. For example Lindskoog quotes a passage claiming it proved that Hooper forged works and put them in Lewis's name. "Did I write all these?" Lewis asked, and then accused Hooper of inventing most of them."⁴⁸ Lindskoog is quoting this from the work Light on C. S. Lewis. What she fails to mention is that Hooper himself wrote this passage, and that it is intended to be friendly banter since Lewis was often absentminded and careless of papers.⁴⁹ While some of her points may have validity, the verification of them is difficult. Kathryn Lindskoog respects Lewis and wants people to see the truth that she sees. Her insight does not always hold up under scrutiny. Whether Hooper forged Lewis's name may never be known, and those close to Lewis who may have known are no longer around to verify what is his work and what is not. Lewis's brother is one person who could have confirmed Lewis's work.

Lewis's brother Warren Lewis, whom Lewis called Warnie, was someone who was close to Lewis, although he was often in and out of Lewis's life. Warren did not like Mrs. Moore and tried to avoid her whenever he could. This complicated Lewis's relationship with his brother since Lewis lived with Mrs. Moore for a large portion of his adult life. Warren also had a serious

drinking problem and was frequently in and out of treatment centers. Lewis was always there when his brother needed him, even if all he could do was write to his brother while he was in a treatment center. Warren was supportive of Lewis's writing though, and they spent significant time together late in Lewis's life. Warren also helped Lewis with answering much of the correspondence that Lewis received on a regular basis. When Warren's drinking got more and more serious in the last few years of Lewis's life, Lewis had to hire a secretary, Hooper, to keep track of the letters and respond to them in a timely manner. Lewis was never organized enough to do so himself. Warren was supportive of his brother, and this gave Lewis encouragement during the various trials of his life. Probably one of the most important aspects of Warren's support was his approval of Lewis's wife, Joy Davidman. Many of Lewis's friends did not get along with his wife, which made Warren's endorsement of her very important.

Joy Davidman would become Joy Davidman Lewis during the short time Lewis and Joy had together. Lewis and Joy wrote letters back and forth to each other long before they ever met each other face to face. Joy was an American writer who had frequently wrote letters to Lewis to ask him for marital advice. Lewis's books and correspondence helped convince Joy to convert to Christianity. The first time Lewis and Joy met, Joy was visiting England to try and reduce the stress in her life caused by her home situation. She was also trying to heal from a recent illness and to find a way to finish her most recent book.⁵⁰ Joy had a wonderful experience while she was in England. On one of her last days there, she received a letter from her husband back in the States, that said he was in love with her cousin Renee and wanted a divorce. Joy's first husband was abusive and unfaithful. Renee had been living with Joy's family for a while by this time because Renee's own husband was even more abusive than Joy's was. Joy had become a Christian later in life and had come to believe that divorce was an unacceptable answer to their

marriage problems, but she finally gave in. After the divorce she moved to England with her two sons. Lewis formally married Joy Davidman to allow her to stay in the country, but it was after they found out Joy was terminally ill with cancer that they had a Christian ceremony and announced their marriage. Joy Davidman Lewis and C. S. Lewis were married for only four years before her death, but Joy's influence on Lewis was important. A Grief Observed was a book about how he felt after the loss of Joy. Lewis had impacted Joy's life, and she had also affected his. Joy's conversion was one example of Lewis's influence on the American public.

Most of Lewis's audience in England was influenced by his radio talks on the BBC, but in America it was his literature that made an impact. England was also a more theologically liberal country, and the more conservative Americans were more receptive to his ideas in general. Chad Walsh wrote this.

Short of a grand scale sociological enterprise . . . the best I can do is to set down in all candour my own personal impressions based on hit-or-miss witness during the twenty years that elapsed between the American publication of *The Screwtape Letters* in 1943 and the death of C. S. Lewis on the same date that saw the assassination of President Kennedy. During those two decades I am convinced that he had an impact on American religious thinking and indeed on the American religious imagination which has been very rarely, if ever, equaled by any other modern writer.⁵¹

Walsh's observation was that Lewis had an uncommon impact on how Americans viewed Christianity. This influence was due to his writing since Americans did not have access to his radio broadcast until they were published in book form. The Screwtape Letters was the work that started the general public's interest in Lewis and his writings. He also replied to the many letters that Americans had sent him. "Any consideration of his impact on America must take these letters into account. Though no bishop ever laid hands upon his head, he was a genuine pastoral counselor via the postal system to many fellow pilgrims who perhaps never sat in the study of an ordained minister."⁵² Joy Davidman is but one example of a person that Lewis gave

advice to through the mail. There are many collections of letters that Lewis sent to Americans that are now published for anyone to read. Lewis's impact on America included both his works and the letters he wrote to Americans.

Although Lewis had a more widespread audience in America, there were those in England who listened to and agreed with his theology. The general public in England was willing to listen and discuss the ideas that Lewis presented them with. People first began hearing about Lewis's ideas through his works, but that was not the only way the British public heard about him. "The BBC rushed him to the microphone and for two or three years his was one of the most familiar voices in England. Each of his twenty-nine radio broadcasts was heard by an audience estimated at 600,000."⁵³ Lewis did have a substantial number of people who were interested in hearing his ideas, and who were also open to discussing issues related to Christianity. The radio broadcasts and his writing were not Lewis's only means of discussing Christianity with the British audience. He also gave lectures on RAF bases and preached sermons. Americans relied on Lewis's works and letters to hear from him. People in England had the advantage of hearing from him first hand and debating with Lewis on an individual level. Lewis may have been more popular among Americans, but this does not diminish the influence he had on the general population of England.

C. S. Lewis impacted many people by finding new insightful ways to view Christianity. To understand his purpose in writing, there needs to be a through understanding of the influence of religion and Christianity throughout his own life. Lewis became an atheist as a teenager and led a life that excluded religion. He did not feel complete in this lifestyle though, and his search for joy eventually led him to the belief in a God. This did not lead him immediately to Christianity. He also had to resolve other issues, such as why pain exists, who Jesus was, and the

reliability of the gospels, before he would accept Christianity. It was because of his personal search for God that he wrote about his conversion. Lewis wanted people to know the logic that he had failed to recognize earlier in life. He was often criticized by his contemporaries and by some people today for oversimplifying unbelievers' views on Christianity, but Lewis never claimed to be a theologian or a philosopher. He did understand more than just the basics of these ideas, and this helped him to pose convincing arguments. His goal was to give the general population a quick snippet of what others said against Christianity. Lewis influenced not only members of his immediate family, but gained a wide following on both sides of the Atlantic. Lewis accomplished what he wanted to do with his writing. He was a layman, and it was from this perspective that he wrote books to help the general public understand Christianity.

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